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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#) [BU](#)

SUBJECT: BULGARIAN COUNCIL OF MINISTERS CONSIDERS DECISION TO LEAVE IRAQ AT THE END OF 2005

REF: A) SOFIA 524 B) SOFIA 436 C) SOFIA 486 D) SOFIA

67 E) 04 SOFIA 2261 F) 04 SOFIA 2054 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Ambassador James Pardew, reasons, 1.4(B) and (D).

[11](#). (C) SUMMARY: The Bulgarian Council of Ministers (CM) is considering a proposal on March 31 to withdraw its troops from Iraq on 31 December 2005 in accordance with the GOB's understanding of UNSCR 1546. During a meeting with Foreign Minister Solomon Passy on March 30, Passy informed Deputy Secretary Zoellick that the CM would task the Parliament to

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determine another form of participation in the Iraq Coalition, such as the NATO Training Mission Iraq (NTM-I). The GOB says this decision will reaffirm Bulgaria's support for the Iraqi government and its commitments to the MNF-I. However with two thirds of the population opposed to Bulgaria's military presence in Iraq, this is an issue that the government is clearly hoping to put behind it before the upcoming June parliamentary elections. END SUMMARY.

[12](#). (C) According to information provided by Foreign Minister Passy on March 30, the CM's decision will allow the GOB to tell the Bulgarian population that the government does in fact have an exit strategy for Iraq, while simultaneously leaving the door open for further participation in NATO training initiatives. The GOB crafted its decision to demonstrate that it is "reaffirming" both its participation in the Coalition and its support for the Iraq government.

[13](#). (SBU) Following are key points of the text submitted to the CM and presented to us on March 30. The text is quoted verbatim from the Bulgarian translation into English. BEGIN TEXT: Key Points of the Council of Ministers draft decision on Bulgaria's participation in support of the international community initiatives for maintaining the security and stability in Iraq.

- Bulgaria remains a member of the international coalition and in coordination with the Iraqi leadership supports the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq.
- Bulgaria will continue to fulfill its obligations until the end of the year in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolution 1546, which sets the mandate of the multinational forces until December 31, 2005.
- The adoption of a national political decision on the parameters of our further participation in Iraq is related to the changing situation in the country and in particular with the successful continuation of the political transition and the elections held on January 30 for Interim National Assembly, provincial councils and autonomous Kurdish Parliament. These elections are a historical milestone both for Iraq and the region as after the elections the Iraqi authorities are in a position to assume more responsibility for stabilization and democratization of the country.
- As the situation has changed after the January 30 elections for Interim National Assembly, there is a potential for cutting the troops in Iraq from 500 to 400 while improving the structures and the staff of the Bulgarian contingent.
- This decision does not come as a result of any external pressure.
- The decision is not a pre-election move. On the contrary, it is a result of the common stand of the allies and the Government's strategy for the country's long-term policy.
- There is a need for additional forms of cooperation to support the newly elected political institutions in Iraq in compliance with the UN Security Council resolutions.

[14](#). (C) COMMENT: The GOB's draft strategy on Iraq likely will create a hot public debate before it is approved by the Parliament in coming weeks. The opposition Socialists smell political blood on this issue for Prime Minister Saxe-Coburg's party. They are likely to generate an intense debate to keep it going as long as possible before the June 25 Parliamentary elections in Bulgaria.